

# Food, Health and You

## Living with HIV



**“Eating well helps us stay strong,  
have more energy and boosts our  
body’s immune system.”**

## Why do people with HIV/AIDS have to eat healthy?



---

“I never paid much attention to what I ate before I got HIV. Now—I know eating well is more important than ever. I make sure I eat plenty of good, fresh foods that give me energy. Even on the days when eating is one of the last things on my mind.” *El*

---

As you know, having HIV weakens your immune system. Eating healthy helps your body fight illness. Eating the right foods in the right amounts can give you that extra energy you need. Some days you may feel too weak or too sick to eat. Yet—eating well can help you fight the virus.

### Eat healthy:

- Get enough calories each day to help you stay at a healthy weight.
- Stay away from “junk food” or “fast food” choices.
- Eat fruits and vegetables for vitamins and fiber.
- Be careful when you prepare foods so you won’t get sick.



## Make sure you eat enough each day.



---

“My doctor says to eat 5 or 6 meals on the days I don’t feel like eating a big breakfast, or a full lunch and dinner. On days I do eat three good-sized meals, I make sure to also eat healthy snacks in between.” 🍌

---

Talk to your doctor or nutritionist about how much you should eat each day to stay at a healthy weight. A nutritionist can help you find the best food choices for you.

### Plan before you eat:

- Shop with a list of foods you will need to make healthy meals and snacks.
- Buy healthy snacks such as nuts, whole-grain crackers, and fruits. They are quick and easy to eat when you are hungry.
- Shop when you are not hungry. It will help you buy items that are good for you.



---

“Some days are so busy I don’t have time to prepare a meal. Or, I find I am just tired and don’t feel like cooking. That’s why I make enough to freeze for 3 or 4 meals when I do cook.” 🍌

---

---

## Here are some good ideas for quick, healthy meals.

### For breakfast try:

- Cereal with milk and fruit.
- A slice of whole grain bread with peanut butter and jam. Drink some juice too!
- An apple or pear with crackers and cheese.



### For lunch you can eat:

- Tuna fish on crackers or whole-grain bread with a handful of carrots.
- A big tossed salad with cheese and meat (chicken, turkey or ham).
- Ham or turkey on whole grain bread with cheese, lettuce and tomatoes.



 **Make sure to add a piece of fruit and a drink (100% fruit juice or water) to your lunch.**

### For dinner, try these tips:

- Cook thin slices of chicken breast, beef or fish fillets in a pan with olive oil. Add garlic, spices, onions and a little salt and pepper for flavor. Serve over rice with cooked frozen vegetables.
- Cook ground turkey or ground beef in a skillet. Add tomato sauce to the meat and pour over cooked noodles. You can even add vegetables to this pasta dish.
- When you make hard boiled eggs, rice or potatoes, make enough for two meals. Put the extras in the fridge to eat the next day.
- When you cook stews or casseroles, make enough to eat for more than one meal. Freeze the extras in separate containers for future meals.

### For healthy snacks, in between meals, try:

- Crackers and cheese.
- Bread and peanut butter and jelly.
- Yogurt or pudding in a cup.
- Nuts and dried fruits.
- Your favorite fruit.
- Lowfat soy or rice milk if you are lactose intolerant.



---

## What to do when you don't have a kitchen.

**You can still make healthy food. Try any of the following:**

- Single serving foods such as pudding, yogurt or fruit cups.
- Juice and milk boxes.
- Nuts and dried fruit.
- Single serving cans of meat or tuna fish on bread.
- Pretzels and fresh fruit.
- Granola or energy bars.
- Salads at fast food restaurants. Order ones with cheese or meat. Try a low-fat or oil and vinegar dressing.


**If you have a hot plate or microwave, try:**

- Canned soup or chili.
- Instant oatmeal. Stir in nuts and raisins.
- Macaroni and cheese. Add a chopped tomato.

## Aim for a healthy weight.

Being too thin or too heavy is not good when you have HIV. Talk to your doctor or nutritionist about ways to stay at a weight that is healthy for you.

---

“My doctor says that I have to gain weight to fight HIV. I find eating lots of small meals is helping me add needed pounds.” 

---



**If you need to gain weight:**

- Eat healthy foods with lots of calories per serving such as nuts and dried fruits.
- Eat cheese and crackers or a cup of yogurt between meals.
- Eat foods that are high in protein. There is a lot of protein in meat, chicken, milk and cheese. Eggs have a lot of protein too.



## Why should you eat more fruits and vegetables?

- They give you vitamins and minerals your body needs to fight disease.
- They give you fiber that helps your bowel movements stay regular.



---

“My family is not wild about eating vegetables. What can I do to get more vegetables in our meals?” 🥕

---

### To add more vegetables and fruits into your day, try these tips:


- Use canned and frozen fruits and vegetables if you don't have fresh ones.
- Offer dried fruits such as apples, apricots, raisins, or prunes. They make good snacks and stay fresh for a long time.
- Serve cut up carrots, green peppers and celery with low fat dip.
- Add mixed frozen vegetables to your soups or stews.
- Mash cooked yellow squash, carrots or sweet potatoes. Add them to soups and stews to thicken the broth.
- Serve fruit instead of sweets after dinner.



## Other things you should know about eating healthy.



---

“I know salt is not good for my blood pressure. How can I cut down on salt?” 

---

### About salt.

Eating too much salt and salty food can be bad for your health, especially if you have high blood pressure.

#### Try these hints to lower salt:

- Take the salt shaker off your table.
- Spice your foods with more herbs and other spices for flavor.  
Or, use a salt substitute.
- Buy crackers, canned soups and packaged meats that say “no salt” or “low salt” on the label.

### About fat and cholesterol.

No matter what you weigh, you can have too much fat and cholesterol in your blood.

#### Try these hints to lower your cholesterol:

- Look for the words “no fat” on the food label.
- Eat lean meats and white-meat chicken (no visible white or yellow fat).
- Eat less eggs each week.
- Drink low fat milk. That means skim, 1% or 2% milk or if you are lactose intolerant, try low fat soy or rice milk.
- Cook with olive oil or canola oil.
- When eating at fast food restaurants, stay away from French fries and other deep fried foods. Instead order salads with meat or cheese, a grilled chicken sandwich or a single burger. Try a baked potato with cheese and broccoli.

---

## About Food Safety.

People with HIV/AIDS can easily get sick from foods. Eating spoiled food can give you diarrhea or make you sick to your stomach. In some cases you may vomit or get food poisoning.

### To avoid getting sick from food:

- Buy and eat canned or packaged foods before their “expiration”, “sell by” or “use by” date.
- When eating out, pick fruits with skin you can peel such as oranges or bananas. Other fruits are great to eat at home where you can wash them well.
- Reheat leftover foods until they are hot and steaming before eating.
- Wash your hands before cooking and eating. Wash them after going to the bathroom and changing diapers.
- Wash all fruits and vegetables before cooking.
- Wash your cutting boards with soap and hot water after every use.
- Use different cutting boards to prepare meats and vegetables if you can.



---

“I never paid attention to germs before I got HIV. Now, I read labels, and pay attention to how safe food is.” 🍏

---



---

### **To avoid eating spoiled food:**

- Defrost foods and meat in the refrigerator, not in the sink.
- Keep foods that are served hot, hot (like cooked meat and beans).
- Keep foods that are served cold, cold (like milk, potato salad and diced cold cuts or sandwich meats).
- If you bring leftovers home, make sure you put them in the fridge right away.

### **About Nutrition Drinks and Vitamin and Mineral Pills.**

Canned supplement drinks or powders, like Ensure® are good when you can't eat enough solid food. They are also good as snacks when you need to gain weight. Persons living with HIV or AIDS may need extra vitamins and minerals each day.

### **Ask your doctor or nutritionist:**

- If you need to take a multivitamin with minerals every day. Your doctor can give you a prescription.
- If your insurance, medicaid or ADAP will pay for vitamin and mineral pills.
- If you need supplements, and which ones are best.



## HIV Medicine and Food.

Some HIV medicine can make you feel sick. Changing the foods you eat may help you to feel better.



---

“At times I feel sick from the medicine and I don’t feel like eating.” 🙄

---

🙄 **Unless your doctor tells you to, do not stop taking your HIV medication if it makes you sick. Call your doctor right away.**

### **Tips for eating well and managing your new HIV medications:**

- Ask your doctor if there are foods you should eat or should NOT eat with your medication.
- Talk with your doctor about the way your medicine makes you feel.
- Eat even if you feel sick. Speak to a nutritionist who can help you find foods to eat even when you are not feeling well.
- Drink plenty of liquids such as water or fruit juice. Drinking 6 to 8 glasses each day is the best. Drink them throughout the day.



---

## What to do if you are pregnant.

**Pregnant women have special needs. There are things you can do to keep yourself and your baby healthy:**

- Drink extra water, milk and juice.
- Stick to a healthy diet.
- Do not use tobacco, alcohol, or illegal drugs.
- Take your HIV medications the way your doctor tells you. If you need help, ask your doctor.
- Make sure you eat enough food and take a daily prenatal vitamin and mineral pill. Your doctor can prescribe one for you.

## What to do when paying for food is hard

Talk to your case manager about free food programs. Some programs deliver meals. Others programs give you groceries.



---

“At times, my money doesn’t last until the end of the month. Yet, I need to eat to stay healthy.” *EB*

---

### For more information on getting food:

Food stamps can help you pay for groceries. You may be able to get food stamps even if you are not on welfare. To find out where to apply for food stamps in your area call the New York Temporary Assistance Hotline at 1-800-343-3009.

WIC is a food program for pregnant women, women with infants and young children. Call the Growing Up Healthy Hotline toll-free at 1-800-522-5006 to find out more.

**For more information about HIV/AIDS and to find an HIV/AIDS case manager or nutrition services in New York State, call:**

1-800-541-AIDS English (1-800-541-2437)  
1-800-233-SIDA Spanish (1-800-233-7432)

**NYS HIV/AIDS TTY Information line:**

1-212-925-9560

Voice callers use the NY Relay: 711 or 1-800-421-1220  
and ask the operator for 1-212-925-9560

**For free and low-cost medical care and medicines for people with HIV in New York State call ADAP PLUS at:**  
1-800-542-AIDS (1-800-542-2437)



---

“Having HIV is not easy. I make sure I eat all the right foods and prepare them safely. I also take all my vitamins and minerals. Doing this helps me live well with HIV.” *ES*

---